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SUBJECT: GUINEA: FRANCE OFFERS NEW ASSISTANCE AS "CARROT"

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, 1.4 (b/d
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11. (C) SUMMARY: France was quick to respond to the February 25 naming of Lansana Kouyate as Guinea's Prime Minister, sending Minister-Delegate Brigitte Girardin (Cooperation, Development, Francophonie) to Conakry for a lightning visit on March 1. She met with Kouyate and announced a 1.1 million euro French assistance package (1 million euro for specific water management projects and 100,000 euro to assist those most in need as a result of the general strike/state of siege). The MFA recognizes that the GOF could be criticized for acting prematurely, but notes the strong urging of President Chirac's office that Girardin visit Guinea and provide the assistance package ("carrot") as a sign of support for Kouyate and encouragement for Guineans after the turmoil of the past several weeks. At the working-level, the MFA remains concerned that Guinea could readily backslide into another round of unrest and that Kouyate's selection may raise expectations that he will find difficult to meet. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) MFA desk officer Damien Syed on March 1 (and in a follow-up conversation on March 2) reviewed events in Guinea since the naming of Lansana Kouyate as PM, the lifting of the "state of siege," and the ending of the general strike. He said that the GOF was pleased that tensions had lowered significantly and that "normal" life was returning to Guinea.

13. (C) Notably, Syed commented on the decision to send Minister-Delegate Brigitte Girardin (Cooperation, Development, Francophonie) to Conakry on March 1 (her arrival there was taking place at the same time we were meeting with Syed). Girardin was already scheduled to hold consultations on Cote d'Ivoire in Burkina Faso and then travel to Abidjan on March 1 in order to take part in the planned March 2 IWG meeting. Syed said that on February 27, the French Presidency "firmly suggested" (Syed refrained from using the word "ordered") that Girardin stop briefly in Conakry. Her purpose was to show French support for the naming of Kouyate as PM (who would take office on March 1 prior to Girardin's arrival) and the steps both government and opposition had taken to end the "state of siege" and general strike.

14. (C) Girardin met with Kouyate on March 1, Syed reported the next day. They had known each other from previous experiences, including the Cote d'Ivoire IWG process, in which they had both been involved at various points. According to Syed, Kouyate made a positive impression on Girardin, seemed committed, but at the same time was under no illusion about the difficulty of the tasks before him. Kouyate had made a similar impression on France's ambassador in Conakry when the two met earlier in the week.

15. (C) Girardin announced a new package of French assistance while in Conakry. This package consists of 1 million euro specifically earmarked for water resource management and 100,000 euro to assist those "most in need" as a result of the "state of siege" and general strike. Syed took care to note that the 1 million euro water resource fund was very specific in nature, and, for example, provided that specific types of water pumps would be installed in specific facilities in specific villages. He said France had done its utmost to ensure the money would not be misspent or diverted elsewhere for other purposes.

16. (C) Anticipating our question, Syed said that the GOF well understood that others might wonder if this largesse was premature inasmuch as Kouyate had just been named and there was no clear indication that positive change would occur in Guinea, notwithstanding the reduction in turmoil caused by the ending of the "state of siege" and general strike. He said that "we believe it an appropriate moment to provide 'carrots' instead of 'sticks' and that this relatively small package will not only serve to validate the choice of Kouyate but also provide encouragement that Guinea has taken at least one step -- an important step -- in the right direction."

17. (C) Syed readily acknowledged that Guinea's situation remained precarious. "Naming Kouyate was a good first step, which we want to recognize, but will he have real power? Will he be manipulated by Conte and his followers, as Konan Banny has been manipulated in Cote d'Ivoire? Will the army remain quiet?" Syed observed that much remained to be determined and that Guinea could easily backslide into turmoil if there were not visible steady progress, even if

PARIS 00000861 002 OF 002

only slow progress. He cautioned that Guineans might think that Kouyate's arrival signaled an imminent improvement in their lives, something not likely in the short-term, Syed noted, "or ever, if Guinea does not deal with its real underlying problem -- the incompetence and cynicism of the Conte regime." He said that the GOF viewed the naming of Kouyate as an important step that might help Guinea address its fundamental problem and assist it in moving out of the Conte era.

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